

# Preface: Querying Queer

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01/06

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Preface

## QUEER

*adjective* (queer-er, queer-est)

- 1) strange; odd or unconventional, as in behavior; eccentric
- 2) deviating from the expected or normal
- 3) of a questionable nature or character; suspicious
- 4) Slang: Fake; counterfeit
- 5) feeling slightly ill; queasy
- 6) Offensive Slang: Informal usu. (esp. of a man): homosexual
- 7) Usage Problem: Of or relating to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, or transgendered people.

*noun*

- 1) Offensive Slang: Informal usu. Used as a disparaging term for a homosexual person
- 2) Usage Problem: A lesbian, gay male, bisexual, or transgendered person.

*verb* [ trans. ] Slang: queered, queer-ing, queers

- 1) to spoil, ruin or thwart (an agreement, event, or situation)
- 2) to put (someone) in a bad position

*origin:* early 16<sup>th</sup> cent.: considered to be from German *quer* 'oblique, perverse, off-center', from Middle Low German *dwer*, but the origin is doubtful.

## QUERY

1. *noun* (pl. que-ries)

- 1) a question, esp. one addressed to an official or organization; an inquiry
- 2) a doubt in the mind; a mental reservation
- 3) a notation, usually a question mark, calling attention to an item in order to question its validity or accuracy.

2. *verb* (que-ried, que-ry-ing, que-ries)

- 1) to ask a question about something, esp. in order to express doubt or uncertainty about it or to check its validity or accuracy; question: query someone's motives.
- 2) to put a question or questions to (someone)
- 3) to mark (an item) with a notation in order to question its validity or accuracy.

*origin:* mid 17<sup>th</sup> cent.: anglicized form of the Latin imperative *quaere*, used in the 16th cent. in English as a verb in the sense [inquire] and as a noun meaning [query,] from Latin *quaerere* 'to ask, to seek.'<sup>1</sup>

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The etymology and everyday meanings of the words queer and query may be very far from each other, while the pronunciation of the words is disturbingly similar for an untrained ear of a non-native speaker of English. But in the conceptual sphere of Queer Studies the jumbling and juggling of the words suddenly becomes meaningful. What is the purpose of Queer Studies and Queer Theory if not the constant querying of the truths and the reality that we are used to?

Despite and due to the word's many connotations, queer has become a very useful conceptual tool for research and theory that concentrates on sexuality, gender and a wide variety of non-normativities. Queer is a word that questions the meanings of stable and fixed categories of identity, hegemonic truths on relationships, families, reproduction and desire, and the relevance of universalized normativities. At the same time, queer promotes respect on individuality, diversity and plain fun. In the academia queer reminds that no paradigm, theory or axiom can perfectly explain the world – quite the contrary: when paradigms and theories become canonized they often lose their explanative, descriptive and critical power.

Because of this, queer has a challenging task ahead. How to combine the revolutionary nature and querying characters of queer and the institutionalization of Queer Studies in ways that do not make the concept of queer lose its questioning power? How to have a discussion with all those Butlers, Sedgwicks, Groszs and Edelmans without monumentalizing them? How to keep queer permanently unstable?

### **Queer query, indeed.**

We are proud to be the editors of the very first issue of a multidisciplinary and international journal *SQS – Suomen Queer-tutkimuksen Seuran Lehti – Tidskrift för Queerforskning i Finland – Journal of Queer Studies in Finland*. Although the journal is part of the institutionalization process of Queer Studies in Finland, we hope that queer never becomes an institution in itself. It is crucial to keep the concept of queer and Queer Studies in constant motion and a process of becoming.

The *SQS* is published by Suomen Queer-tutkimuksen Seura – Sällskapet för Queerforskning i Finland – the Society of Queer Studies in Finland (*SQS*). The society was founded on July 6th, 2004 in order to promote Queer Studies in Northern Europe. It supports queer research and critical, theoretical and empirical explorations of genders and sexualities. This includes research on lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual issues. Although the society encompasses these issues, it advocates a critical approach on all existing categories. *SQS* respects the ground breaking work of gay and lesbian studies – with a critical view or a Queer Eye. The society also reminds us of the importance of studying heteronormativity as well as heterosexualities. The focus is on research, which deconstructs and questions existing categories of identity and hegemonies of discourse. As a community of scholars and students, *SQS* engages ideas and interpretations in a multidisciplinary manner. The society participates in public debates and seeks to establish connections with other societies, communities and researchers. The society also

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aspires to strengthen the academic status of scholars who do queer research. The goal of the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* is to support the Society of Queer Studies in Finland in its actions and aims to make queer studies more visible by offering a multidisciplinary forum for research. In addition, the journal provides a forum for debate and discussion.

The *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* is trilingual: it publishes articles, commentaries and reviews written in Finnish, Swedish and English. Finland, being a bilingual country, has a long history of coexistence of two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. The SQS society wants to provide equal opportunities for both Finnish and Swedish speaking people to write for the journal. Thus, it was natural to decide that the journal will be bilingual. However, English is currently the unofficial lingua franca of academia, and for now the fact holds true especially in Queer Studies, which has quite an Anglo-American history (see also Mizilienka's article in this issue). Therefore it is necessary to provide access to the journal also for those people who do not speak Finnish or Swedish. The articles of the current issue are all written in English, while the commentaries and reviews are written in Finnish. The trilingual character of the journal will be maintained in the following issues, and we welcome submissions of articles and other texts in all three languages.

Being an academic journal published in Northern Europe, in a small country whose official language is not Indo-European, the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* claims that studying peripheries and spatial and temporal

marginalities can be read as a queer project in itself. While Anglo-American queer theories have focused mostly on Anglophone countries and urban centers, the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* aims to provide a broader perspective for Queer Studies. Texts about local and peripheral situations, relationships, experiences and people that can be labeled 'queer' reveal and confirm the unconformity of queerness – the very effectiveness of the concept. The study of centers gains depth when the centers are critically compared and negotiated with peripheries and margins. Therefore SQS is by no means restricted in its area - whether that area is geographical or mental.

While the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* reminds US about the instability of existing normativities, it still yields to certain academic norms that ensure the validity and reliability of research. Hence the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* is a peer-reviewed academic journal. The anonymity of the writers and reviewers is maintained to ensure the impartiality of the reviewer's comments. Articles submitted will be peer reviewed and commented on by at least two referees, who are experts on the author's particular field. Commentaries, reviews and other submitted texts are reviewed by the editorial board.

The *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* is published twice a year, during late spring and early winter. Article and other text submissions will be accepted throughout the year. The journal

is an open access journal so it is available online for anyone to read free of charge. This is one of the tools through the help of which Queer Studies gets not only noticed but also

developed internationally in a wide network of researchers and scholars. This way, it is more likely for the research to get quoted, elaborated on and advanced and it will reach a multidisciplinary academic audience along with other audiences in a fast and easy manner.

The journal is composed of four sections. The first section, named “QueerScope: Articles / Pervoskooppi: artikkelit” consists of peer reviewed articles. We would like to see the title QueerScope to refer to an imaginary scientific tool that is used to look at things that are seen as queer, but also those things that are looked at queerly. QueerScope can be compared to a reliable telescope or a microscope but also to a kaleidoscope that provides different views each time one looks through it. The word ‘-scope’ comes from the Latin word *-scopium*, which denotes to enabling the eye to view or examine or make observations. Thus we see QueerScope as a telling title for a queer studies journal section that introduces queer research.

The second section, “Queer Mirror: Perspectives / Pervo-peili: katsaukset” provides a forum for debate and discussion. It reflects the wide variety of thoughts, ideas and themes present on the field of Queer Studies. The section coaxes different and more informal conversation than the articles can due to their restrictions set by academic practices, rules and discourses. Especially in the Finnish language, the title of the section refers to the glances, stares and winks that an essay can produce and attract. The Queer Mirror section can contain several special features such as viewpoints, commentaries and interviews. The subsection of Queer Mirror, “QueerView Mirror: reports

/ Pervo/peruutus/peili: raportit” introduces recently completed post-graduate studies and dissertations and other interesting features that deserve to get noticed or reported on. The name of the subsection refers to the way in which the writers look back at their finished work, a visited conference or a finished project, and maybe see it differently from afar. Although one cannot ignore to mention that the title, most delicately, has its admirable connotations to rear end and anality, as well.

The third section “Queer Lens: Art Gallery / Pervolinssi: taidegalleria” presents art; visual, audiovisual, conceptual, digital... Art can focus on certain parts of the reality and distort it like a skewed lens with which the world can be seen differently. Looking through the lens of art, the common truths can be queered. On the one hand, *The Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* introduces artists and their work that challenge the notions of gender, sexuality and the body. On the other hand, art, which can be seen through a queer lens and which gets queered this way, is a possible topic, too. The fourth section, “Queer Eye: Reviews / Pervosilmäys: arvostelut” contains mostly reviews of monographs and anthologies, but reviews for example on fiction, films, exhibitions, theatre plays or performances are also welcome.

The very first issue of *The Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* takes a critical look at the context of Queer Studies, and extends the contemporary Anglo-American influenced character of queer theories and research. The current issue concentrates on queering the lesbian and gay historiography and pays tribute to the tradition of gay and

lesbian studies. The guest editor Tuula Juvonen has coordinated five articles into a package of QueerScope, in which the five international articles complement each other. Each article puts its emphasis on a different facet of lesbian and gay historiography. The articles of Antu Sorainen and Tuula Juvonen describe the same sex sexualities in Finland, Arne Nilsson gives his insight on men's relationships on Swedish ships and Eibhear Walshe compares the possibilities of queer communities in Ireland and England. Joanna Mizilienska's article about a Polish queer scholar, herself, doing research on Finnish queer scholars binds the articles together with its provocative evaluation of the position of queer theories in non-Anglophone countries.

Lasse Kekki's and Pia Livia Hekanaho's essays and Kaisa Ilmonen's, Sanna Karkulehto's and Antu Sorainen's reports of their dissertations comprise the second part of the issue under the main title of Queer Mirror. Kekki and Hekanaho mirror their themes against contemporary literature and research. Kekki's essay has a troubling theme, namely gay hate murders. He compares the murders of American Matthew Shepard and Brandon Teena to the murders of Swedish Johan Petterson and Josef Ben Meddour. The geographical locations of the murders play an important part in the comparison: Shepard's and Teena's fates were mythologized, and they became the martyrs of American gay liberation, while the murders of Swedish Petterson and Meddour remained unrecognized. Hekanaho seeks the queer methodologies that are useful in theorizing local and peripheral queer spaces and times. Her essay has a discussion with Judith Halberstam and Mark W. Turner

about the spatialities and temporalities of cruising culture and transgender bodies. In addition, it has interesting dialogues with the other articles of the issue and with Kekki's essay.

Ilmonen's introduction to the themes of her licenciate thesis opens the subsection of Queer View Mirror. While most of the writers of the issue stay in Europe, except some quick jumps to the US, Ilmonen describes the unique multi-cultural situation of Caribbean through Michelle Cliff's novels. Ilmonen seeks the non-normativities of Cliff's life and writings by contrasting the concepts of whiteness, negritudé and queer. She highlights Cliff's project of rewriting Caribbean women's history. Sanna Karkulehto, who also introduces the themes of her licenciate thesis for the readers, takes a very personal starting point. She ponders the position of gender, sexuality and queer in popular culture and admits that doing queer studies is not only political but also a pleasurable adventure. Her introduction combines the theoretical approach to queer theory with intimate accounts on her feelings about doing queer studies. Antu Sorainen presents her doctoral dissertation on court cases in which women were accused for "fornication with the members of the same sex". The introduction is based on an informal lecture she gave recently after the public defense of her doctoral thesis.

The very first artist to be presented in the Queer Lens Art Gallery of the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* is Aurora Reinhard, a photographer, film maker and performance artist who has analyzed the flexibility of gender, sexuality and body in her works. Art historian

Annamari Vänskä's introduction to Reinhard's work highlights the queeriest points of photographs located in our gallery.

The issue ends with three book reviews in Queer Eye. Leena-Maija Rossi reviews Harri Kalha's book *Tapaus Magnus Enckell* (The case of Magnus Enckell) that describes the interpretations of Magnus Enckell's art in Finnish art history. A ground breaking anthology about porn studies, *Jokapäiväinen pornomme* (Our Daily Porn) is reviewed by Sanna Karkulehto. Jenny Kangasvuo comments on Antu Sorainen's doctoral dissertation *Rikollisia sattumalta?* (Accidental criminals?) that considers the court cases, held in Eastern Finland during the 1950's, in which the concept of woman's sexuality and judicial discourse clashed.

The first issue is a telling combination of contemporary Finnish, Scandinavian and European Queer Studies. The issue highlights the fact that queer theories, theorization and Queer Studies are still quite small, quite young, quite decentered and multidisciplinary field of research. For example Antu Sorainen's article, her introduction to her dissertation in QueerView Mirror, and Jenny Kangasvuo's review of Sorainen's doctoral dissertation make an interesting example of the development of Queer Studies in Finland during the past ten years. Sorainen's career reflects the launching of Queer Studies and queer theories in the Finnish academia: even if the queer theories were born in Anglo-American countries, queer became a significant concept in Finland fairly quickly. The concept of queer has enabled scholars to develop new critical

approaches to research and theories on sexuality, gender and the body and, consequently, broadened the Finnish understanding of these issues even on a societal level.

As the editors of the very first issue of the *Journal of Queer Studies in Finland*, we would like to thank the people who have made the denaturalized pregnancy and the painful but dear birth of the journal easier. First, our warmest thanks to Tuula Juvonen, who has been eager to help us in all possible problems that can occur when editing a journal. We also want to thank the contributors for their inspirational insights, competence and patience. The board of the Society of Queer Studies in Finland has helped us to keep the practical things running. The referees, who will naturally remain anonymous, ensure the academic quality of the journal and for that we are most humbly thankful. Maria Kuusisto and Niina Kuorikoski deserve our perpetual respect and gratitude for their perseverance with the proofreading process. And last but not least, we want to thank Anne Aurasmaa, who created the visual appearance for the journal and who inspired us also on the metaphorical level while constructing the concept of this journal, and without whom the journal would be just a plain package of words.

### Notes

1. The dictionary entries used in this preface are combinations of entries in The Oxford English Dictionary and The Oxford American Dictionary (<http://dictionary.oed.com/>; Dictionary.app 1.0.1., Oxford American Dictionary, sv. *queer*, *query*, *scope*).